

**EXPERT SYMPOSIUM ON
INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

Population Division
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**CONTRIBUTION
TO THE EXPERT SYMPOSIUM ON INTERNATIONAL MIGRATION AND DEVELOPMENT**

International Labour Organization (ILO)

¹The views expressed in the paper do not imply the expression of any opinion on the part of the United Nations Secretariat.

ILO Work on Labour Migration Statistics

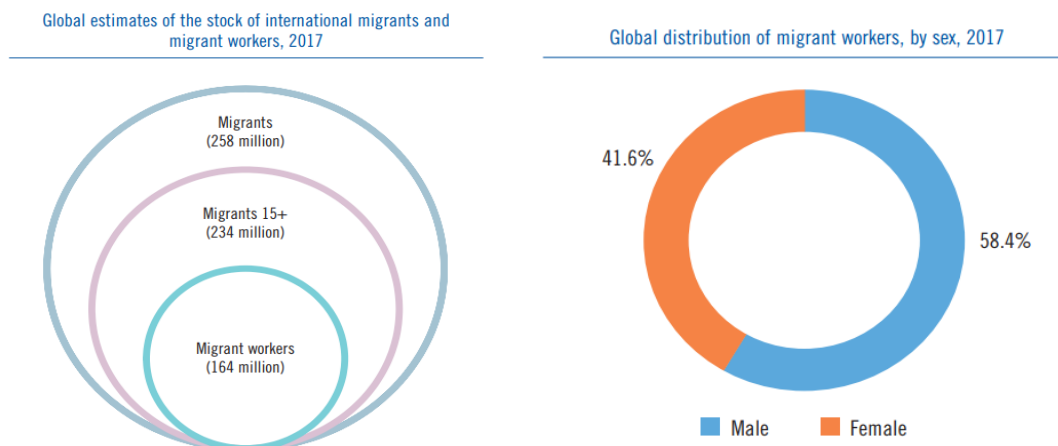
Introduction

High-quality and up-to-date labour migration statistics are a key prerequisite for designing, implementing and monitoring evidence-based labour migration policies. However, there is still a lack of comprehensive official statistical data on migrant workers at the national, regional and global levels. Two main obstacles to the collection and comparability of labour migration statistics are (i) the absence of international statistical standards on concepts and definitions and lack of a common methodology, and (ii) inadequate data collection systems in developing countries.

The *ILO Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers*¹ report is part of a broader ILO effort to address these two obstacles and to improve the global harmonization, collection and production of labour migration statistics. It will contribute to the implementation of the new *Guidelines concerning statistics of international labour migration*², adopted by the 20th International Conference of Labour Statisticians (ICLS) in October 2018.

Main Findings

Based on figures for 2017 provided by the United Nations/Department of Economic and Social Affairs (UN/DESA), there are 258 million international migrants, 234 million migrants of working age (15 and older) and 164 million migrant workers worldwide. For the purposes of ILO estimates, the term “migrant worker refers to international migrant individuals of working age and older who are either employed or unemployed in their current country of residence. Overall, migrants of working age constitute 4.2 per cent of the global population aged 15 and older, while migrant workers constitute 4.7 per cent of all workers.



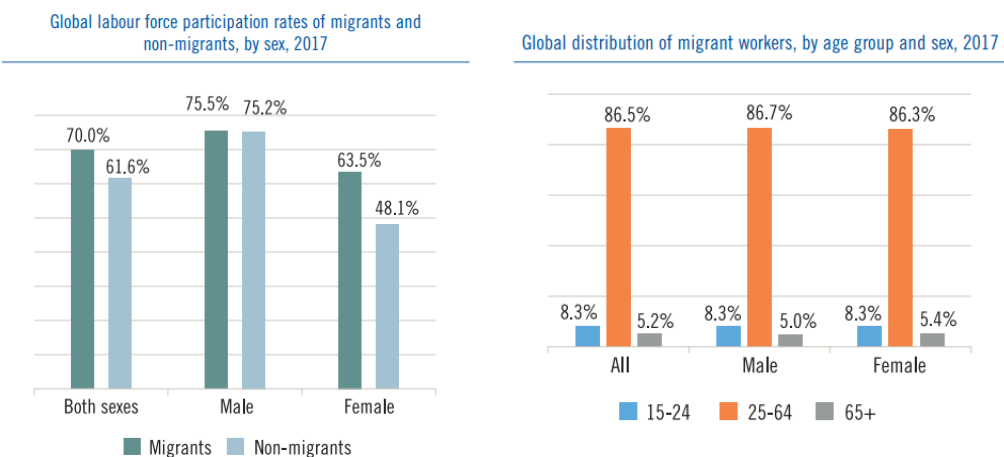
Source: ILO (2018).

¹ ILO. 2018. *Global Estimates on International Migrant Workers: Results and Methodology*. International Labour Organization, Geneva. Available at:

https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---dcomm/---publ/documents/publication/wcms_652001.pdf

² ICLS. 2018. *Guidelines concerning statistics of international labour migration*. International Labour Organization. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_648922.pdf

Men constitute a larger proportion of migrant workers. In 2017, the stock of male migrant workers was estimated to be 95.7 million, while the corresponding estimate for female migrant workers was 68.1 million, or 58.4 and 41.6 per cent, respectively, of all migrant workers. Migrants of working age have higher labour force participation than non-migrants of working age, primarily due to the significantly higher labour force participation rates of migrant women compared to non-migrant women. While the participation rates of male migrants and non-migrants were both at par in 2017 (75.5 per cent and 75.2 per cent, respectively), a gap of 15.4 percentage points was found between the participation rates of migrant and non-migrant women (63.5 per cent and 48.1 per cent, respectively). When disaggregating migrant workers by age group, it is found that while youth workers (aged 15-24) and older workers (aged 65 plus) constitute 8.3 per cent and 5.2 per cent, respectively, of migrant workers, prime-age adults constitute 86.5 per cent. This age composition holds for male and female migrant workers alike. The fact that the overwhelming majority of migrant workers consist of prime-age adults suggests that some countries of origin are losing the most productive part of their workforce even if they may receive remittances. Destination countries, on the other hand, may benefit from receiving them as they are increasingly faced with demographic pressures.

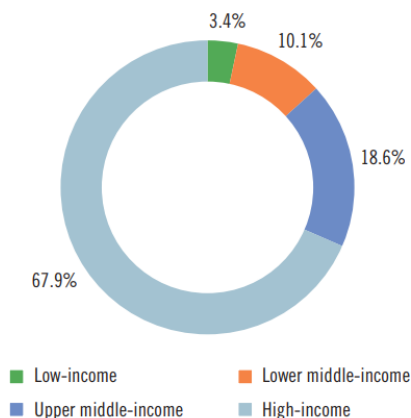


Source: ILO (2018).

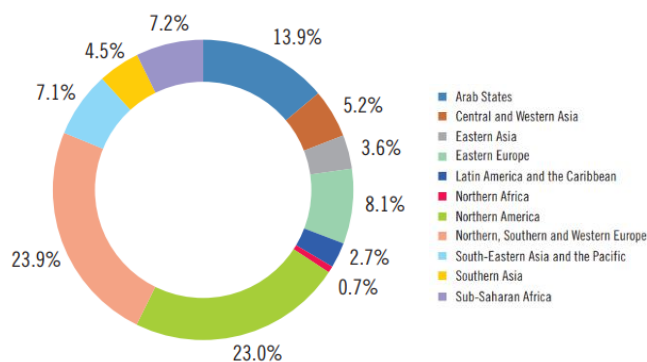
Of the 164 million migrant workers worldwide, 111.2 million (67.9 per cent) are employed in high-income countries, 30.5 million (18.6 per cent) in upper middle-income countries, 16.6 million (10.1 per cent) in lower middle-income countries and 5.6 million (3.4 per cent) in low-income countries. As a proportion of all workers, migrant workers constitute 18.5 per cent of the workforce of high-income countries, but only between 1.4 to 2.2 per cent of the labour force of lower-income countries.

60.8 per cent of all migrant workers are found in three subregions: Northern America (23.0 per cent), Northern, Southern and Western Europe (23.9 per cent) and the Arab States (13.9 per cent). The other subregions that host non-negligible numbers of migrant workers (above 5 per cent) are Eastern Europe, Sub-Saharan Africa, South-Eastern Asia and the Pacific, and Central and Western Asia. The lowest number of migrant workers is hosted by Northern Africa (less than 1 per cent). The subregion with the largest share of migrant workers as a proportion of all workers is the Arab States (40.8 per cent).

Migrant workers, by income level of countries, 2017



Distribution of migrant workers, by broad subregion, 2017



Source: ILO (2018).

Future work

The ILO continues delivering technical assistance on improving labour migration statistics and has further extended the International Labour Migration Statistics (ILMS) database. The ILO, through its Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) TRIANGLE project, funded by Canada, produced the ILMS database to cover the 10 countries of the ASEAN region: Brunei Darussalam, Cambodia, Indonesia, the Lao People's Democratic Republic, Malaysia, Myanmar, the Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Viet Nam. Following six successful rounds of data collection (in November 2013 and July 2014), the data were disseminated in the ILO's ILOSTAT database on international labour statistics as a unique source freely available to users online. The number of countries included in the ILMS database was later extended to include 6 Arab States and, thanks to a memorandum of understanding signed between the ILO and Statistics Korea (KOSTAT), the number of countries in the database was further increased from 16 to 27.

The ILMS database is based on standardized tables defined across three separate modules: (a) international migrant stock, (b) international migrant flow, and (c) nationals abroad. The relevant data is collected through focal points identified by each Member State. The content and format of the questionnaire has recently been revised and improved so as to render the data-collection system more user-friendly. The questionnaire that forms the basis of the ILMS database has been integrated into the annual ILO questionnaire completed by national statistical offices of Member States. Eventually, the ILMS database will continue to contribute to the regular generation of global estimates on migrant workers.

As countries start implementing the new ICLS Guidelines and more data become available, future global estimates may be aligned accordingly and different categories of migrant workers may be included and analysed, such as frontier workers, seasonal workers, etc. In addition, statistics on different aspects of labour migration, such as quality of work, wages, labour rights (linked with the ICLS resolution on SDG indicator 8.8.2)³ and the informal economy may be collected to provide more comprehensive insight for evidence-based policy-making.

³ ICLS. 2018. *Resolution concerning the methodology of the SDG indicator 8.8.2 on labour rights*. International Labour Organization. Available at: https://www.ilo.org/wcmsp5/groups/public/---dgreports/---stat/documents/meetingdocument/wcms_648636.pdf